

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

poor are left destitute, while the substance of the Church is squandered upon harlots. Nay, more, the leprosy of unnatural vice, the sin from which even the devils flee in horror because of their angelical nature, has contaminated their minds and bodies. The priests celebrate Mass after a night of sin, and often their mistresses and children join the congregation ; others use the Blessed Sacrament of the altar to make love-charms to seduce the little sheep of their flock, or persuade them to commit fornication under pretext of delivering them from diabolical possession. Some priests, realizing their own sinful state sufficiently to fear God's judgments, only pretend to consecrate when they say Mass, and thereby lead the people into idolatry by making them worship as the body of Christ what is no more than a piece of bread. The prelates connive at infamous monks corrupting the nuns in the monasteries under their charge. Ministers of the Church have become usurers; benefices and prelacies are bought and sold, while the poor are left to die of hunger. Spiritual things are abandoned, while the rulers of the Church usurp temporal power and secular government.¹ It is only possible here to touch very slightly upon the contents of these terrible chapters; but the student of the religious life of the fourteenth century is compelled to face the fact that in them we have the testimony of Boccaccio's *Decameron* confirmed by the burning words of a great saint, who does not shrink from putting them into the mouth of God

Himself

From this Catherine turns to the contemplation of the Divine Providence, shown in the creation of man in God's image and likeness, with memory, understanding, and will, for the Beatific Vision; in his redemption by means of the Incarnation ; and in the institution of the Blessed Sacrament for his spiritual sustenance. As an instance of this Providence, in a particular case, we have a somewhat mysterious allusion to one whose soul was saved by a

¹ Cap. 12i-cap. 130. Cf. Caesanus Heisterbacensis, *Dialogus miraculorum* (ed. Strange, Cologne, 1851), dist. IX. cap. 6 ; *Revelationes S. Birgittae*, I. 49, IV. 133. An equally appalling picture is given, some years later, by Nicolaa de Cldmanges, in his *De rutna Ecchsiae*, cap. ig-cap. 23 (*Opera*, Leyden, 1613).